

DEC 10 1999

DELTA PROTECTION COMMISSION

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December 8, 1999

Steve Ritchie, Acting Executive Director

CALFED

1416 Ninth Street, 11th Floor

Sacramento, CA 95690

Subject: Delta Protection Commission Review of Category III Grants in the Delta
Primary Zone

Dear Mr. Ritchie:


As you know, the Policy Group directed CALFED staff to seek comments from the Delta Protection Commission regarding the four Category III grants recommended for funding by CALFED staff. CALFED staff and grant representatives attended the Commission's November 17, 1999 meeting. Because the item was not on the Commission's agenda, the Commission could not take a formal action on the proposed grants. The Commission did receive a briefing from CALFED staff and made the following informal comments. None of the comments should be construed as recommending that proposed Category III grants not be awarded as recommended by CALFED staff.

- Prior to funding acquisition of additional privately owned land, CALFED should prepare a master plan for ecosystem restoration in the Delta.
- CALFED should evaluate the existing habitat on State and federally owned lands in the Delta to provide a baseline for the CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Program.
- CALFED should require mandated environmental review prior to acquisition of privately owned lands by State or federal agencies; this process should not be evaded by granting funds to non-profits to acquire and hold lands for government agencies. This requirement would ensure that acquisition of land and implementation of habitat restoration take place in a logical and comprehensive manner.
- Appropriate environmental review should take place prior to implementation of restoration actions.
- Development of restoration projects should include analysis of the loss of habitat associated with existing agricultural uses.

- Restoration projects should ensure “safe harbor” for nearby and adjacent landowners to allow continuation of on-going agricultural practices.
- Enhancement/restoration projects should be carefully designed to include adequate and appropriate buffers on the enhancement site.
- “Willing seller” is not appropriate criteria for evaluation of land for acquisition for habitat enhancement projects.
- Third party impacts associated with conversion of land from agriculture to habitat should be evaluated by CALFED.
- CALFED Category III projects should be reviewed by the Delta Protection Commission as early as possible to allow local review and input.
- Development of baseline data for McCormack Williamson Tract is important.
- Design of a habitat enhancement project on McCormack Williamson Tract should also help solve the local flooding problems, and not make local flooding worse.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed Category III grants in the Delta. The Commission looks forward to working with CALFED on these matters in the next round of funding.

Sincerely,

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Margit Aramburu
Executive Director

cc: Wendy Halverson-Martin

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